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ABSTRACT

Six professional development achools (PDS) have been established in rural West Virginia as a result of an education reform effort. Two junior high schools, two elementary schools, and two high schools have been participating for the past 2 years in restructuring efforts that involve collaboration between public school teachers and university faculty. Project goals include restructuring of the teacher preparation curriculum at West Virginia University (WVU) and the establishment of PDS emphasizing site-based decision making and the development of school visions. Data concerning the project were obtained from meeting minutes of the Cross-Site Steering Committee (CSSC), work session notes, focus-group interviews, individual interviews, and CSSC participants' written responses to open-ended questions. The major issues emerging from the data were: (1) defining what a PDS was and understanding the concept; (2) understanding "who is in charge of the process" and moving toward collaboration; (3) developing relationships among PDS sites and between PDS sites and WVU representatives; and (4) maintaining PDS sites through continued funding, increased participation, and an atmosphere of trust and open communication. The keys to development and maintenance of PDS are the existence of true collaborative activities, thorough planning, consistent communication, a commitment by all those involved, and a belief that the process is important. (KS)

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Issues in Establishing Rural Professional Development Schools

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Objective: This investigation identifies and discusses issues associated with the development and maintenance of successful collaborative processes in Professional Development Schools (PDS) in rural West Virginia. Six PDS sites have been initiated as a result of an education reform effort funded by the collaborative efforts of the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation and West Virginia University. All of the sites are rural with three of the PDS sites being located in poor, sparsely populated school systems. The schools, two junior high school,s two elementary schools, and two high schools, have been participating for the past two years in restructuring efforts that involve collaboration of public school teachers and university faculty.

First, issues related to the establishment of Rural Professional Development Schools are presented. Second, issues seen as important to the successful continuation of the rural PDS sites are presented. Third, advice from individuals involved with the rural PDS sites is reported and discussed.

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Perspective

The Holmes Group, in *Tomorrow's Teachers* and T*omorrow's Schools* have identified, as a crucial component of education reform the need for closer connections between public schools and colleges of education. A 1985 publication by the National Rural Development Institute (Helge, 1983) calls public school/higher education collaborations and partnerships essential to the survival of rural schools. Following the National Rural Development Institute's creation of a rural research agenda, authors such as Cole (1988), Rainey (1987), Askins and Schwisow (1989), and Berger (1989) built upon Holmes Group policy recommendations. These authors further described and investigate collaborative and collegial relationships as avenues for developing higher quality rural schools.

Collaborating for educational change is a complex, beneficial, and dynamic activity in any setting (Lieberman, 1986). However, Cole (1989) and Sher (1983) state that rural teachers lack opportunities to collaborate. Opportunities are not available to most rural teachers because non-teaching duties and numerous class assignments often occupy so much time that "professional sharing time is squeezed out," (Dunne, 1983). Poor self-image is another factor identified by Dunne that prohibits collaboration. Poor self-image often keeps teachers from taking risks and using the innovations associated with collaboration and change that Hord (1986), Sirotnik and Goodlad (1988), and others identify as essential.

An additional factor that can inhibit the formation of collaborative relations is the lack of incentives (Cole, 1989). Rural teachers may not have a motive or reason to change. They may have become victims of a rural education system where teachers have been "done to" instead of "listened to" for years (Francis, 1991). Past experiences with reform efforts have given educators a "this too shall pass" view of innovations and change.

Just as we can not expect innovations to transfer intact from one school to another, we can not believe that the reform of rural schools can have only one solution. As Helge (1985) notes, each rural setting has a subculture of its own. As we plan for rural school improvement, we must focus on the communities and individuals as the foundations from which to build these collegial relationships.

This investigation provides insight into teacher, administrator, and university faculty concerns dealing with the establishment of Rural PDS through the use of collaborative processes. Some of the questions addressed were: what special issues arise for people in both institutions when public schools are located in remote or rural areas? What incentives or reward systems are provided to participants from both institutions? What are some solutions suggested for implementation as a result of these collaborative efforts? How has the opportunity for collaboration changed participants' views about public schooling in rural West Virginia, and the role both teachers and university faculty play in its reform?

Profile of West Virginia as a Poor, Rural State: West Virginia has traditionally been described as a poor, rural state. The average teacher salary in 1991 was $25,967, which rated 46th in the nation. Overall, the earnings in West Virginia are low with the average per capita income in 1990 of $14,174. The

state has ranked in the top five states for the issue of Federal Food Stamps and unemployment rate.

West Virginia ranked 42nd in state and local government expenditures in 1991 while ranking 31st in the nation for per pupil revenue. The student to teacher ratio in 1991 was 15.1 and included all public schools from the state. The average of 15.14 students per square mile in the State of West Virginia was only slightly higher than the 13.15 students per square mile in the three counties in which PDS sites were established. Of the three counties involved in this investigation, none were ranked in the top two quartiles of achievement. Additionally, 77.9% of the ninth graders in the state have traditionally graduated from high school.

***The Benedum Project*::** The Benedum Project is a multi-million dollar public school and higher education restructuring project funded by the Claude J. Worthington Benedum Foundation. The project has two main goals. First is the restructuring of the teacher preparation curriculum at West Virginia University. The other goal is the establishment of Professional Development Schools (PDS) where the best of practice meets the best of research.

The restructuring of the higher education curriculum has involved over 110 faculty and 7 colleges within West Virginia University and has involved higher education representatives from Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts as outside advisors. Public school representatives and West Virginia University students have also been involved in the collaboration to develop the new teacher preparation program. In all, over 250 educators including 153 from public schools have been involved in the redesign project. Although the new program

will not be implemented until the fall of 1993, it has several unique and hopefully effective features. These features include:

- *exposure to the public schools early in the program*
- *the development of long term relationships between school and perspective teachers*
- *multiple field experiences which include a variety of teaching situations situations (tutoring, classroom aide, group leader, and novice teacher to name a few)*
- *a public school semester long student teaching field experience*
- *participation in action research to be completed during the spring of the fifth year as a capstone project*

The second goal, the establishment of Professional Development Schools, has emphasized site based decision making and the development of school visions as the processes through which changes were implemented. The PDS component of the Benedum Project include the Cross-Site Steering Committee (CSSC) which has the mission of communicating and disseminating information, setting policy, and serving as a forum for the six PDS sites and WVU collaborators. The Benedum Project represents a dynamic and evolving set of interactions where all involved seek to find the most effective ways of educating out public school students, preparing our next generation of teachers, and allowing teachers to make the decisions which effect their classroom

Methods

Data were obtained from a variety of sources. Sources included CSSC meeting minutes, work session notes, focus group interviews, individual

interviews, and written responses to open ended questions. As a part of the Benedum Project documentation process, minutes were taken at each CSSC meeting. These minutes provided the opportunity to explore the issues discussed by the participants since the initiation of the Benedum Project.

As a part of this investigation the CSSC participants were given a series of five open-ended questions to respond to at the August 1992 meeting. These questions were meant to promote reflection and allow the participants one more opportunity to recognize issues of importance to the educators associated with the PDS sites.

The focus group interviews were conducted to allow participants to reflect and discuss issues of importance. Participants included were divided into PDS site-administrators, teachers, and West Virginia University representatives. Members of each group were given a starter question to prompt discussion within the group and then encouraged to discuss issues which were important to each of the sites.

Each form of data were separated into idea units to allow for analysis. Additionally, the audiotape recordings were transferred onto computer disk through a modified form of data coding process established by in previous works (Francis, 1992). The computer records were then sorted into idea units in the same manner as the written comments. Coded data were subjected to qualitative analysis. The purpose of the analysis was to develop a series of derived themes from which the research questions could be addressed. The process was initially developed by Spradley (1979) and adapted by Francis (1991).

In the analysis, one event was randomly selected as a theme, or stack starter, and each subsequent coded event was compared to the stack starter. Events concerning the same basic topic or idea as the stack starter were kept in

one set (Stack A), while the rest of the coded events were placed in a second set (Stack B). A second random stack starter was selected from Stack B and each of the coded events from Stack B were compared to this theme starter. Thus Stack B came to represent a second theme and Stack C came to represent the non-matched set. This process was continued until each of the coded events was placed in a stack of coded events. The sorting process was then repeated using randomly selected coded events from Stack A compared to the coded events in Stack B. Stack C, Stack D, etc. The process continued until the coded events, when compared with each other, remained as discrete stacks.

The stacks were then examined for the topics and related ideas within the stack of coded events. This examination resulted in the derivation of themes, or names for the stacks, from which the analysis could proceed. Coded events within each of the derived themes were recorded and charted to allow for totals, averages, comparison to time, and the determination of significant differences.

Results

Data collected from the sources were analyzed to determine the important themes which were issues in the initiation of Professional Development Schools, issues in maintaining Professional Development Schools, and the advice given to others about Professional Development Schools.

Issues in Establishing PDS Sites: The primary issue in the beginning of PDS sites was the issue of defining what a PDS was and understanding the concept. Local decision making and collaboration were relatively new

processes to those involved with the PDS sites. As participants began the journey to become a PDS, teachers wanted to know "what are we supposed to do?", "what are we supposed to be?" and "will this be a good thing to do?". The initial phase of the project was burdened with the development of self-determination by individuals and by schools as organization.

It was during the initial stage that WVU representatives took the most facilitative roles, but provided the least input into decisions. This is evidenced by frequent meetings in which content of the agenda and process were shared, the consistent emphasis on the part of WVU representatives that they could act as resources, and the development of settings which were intended to make all participants feel comfortable and provide input. A variety of committees were formed which allowed the time and authentic situations where collaboration could develop.

A second major issue was "who is in charge of the process?" In 1990, West Virginia educators had just experienced the first state wide teachers strike in the state's history. Teachers were at odds with other teachers, legislators, administrators, and trust was, to say the least, at an all time low. This made collaboration even more difficult.

Collaboration was used as a "buzz word" but teachers involved in the PDS sites were very unsure of the types of situations they were to be placed in. As one teacher stated "looking back it's amazing how far we have come. In our first meeting our committee looked like a bargaining table. There were the Public School people on one side and WVU people on the other." The teacher went on to state that "now titles, degrees, and schools don't seem to matter. We are all here to make our schools and our programs better; you know, to collaborate". Additionally, teachers were excited about the restructuring or as they put it "the possibilities" but they were "leary about who should be in charge". Reflecting

back to the beginning of the Benedum Project, teachers confessed that one of the main concerns was what the Benedum Project would mean in their classroom. They were unfamiliar with collaboration, their school's vision had yet to be developed, and teachers wanted to know what the project would provide as resources or opportunities in their classroom.

Another issue important to the initiation of PDS activities was the development of relationships. Participants saw the time invested in allowing relationships to grow as "money wisely invested". Relationships needed to be built between the PDS sites which included a large and a small rural high school, a small rural middle school, two small elementary schools, and a large rural elementary school. Participants were initially unfamiliar and unskilled at working as a group. Secondary teachers had seldom dealt with elementary teachers, first grade teachers were not used to dealing with high school physics teachers and math teachers were not experienced at dealing with language arts teachers. In short, many new relationships needed to be, and eventually were, built.

Public school relationships were not the only relationships in question. The role of WVU representatives and the relationships between university and public school participants were of great concern early in the process. Representatives of the rural PDS sites were concerned with the "short term"investment and of the "neglect" they might have faced as a result of their distance from the WVU campus. Teachers were also concerned WVU faculty would "dominate" discussions or would "control" committee meetings by discussing theory or conjecture. Teachers were concerned with the concrete facts of life in the classroom and their situation as a rural school.

It is important to note here that these were not the only stated concerns of the participants in establishing rural professional development schools. However,

these do represent the most frequent, and usually the most intense concerns during the first full year as a Professional Development School.

Issues in Maintaining PDS sites: A variety of key issues emerged as being important to the maintenance of the established PDS sites. These issues included:

- *a need for certainty of the future of the project*
- *increased participation by public school and higher education representatives*
- *ongoing efforts to maintain positive feelings of trust*
- *open communication, and resource acquisition.*

Professional development and additional staffing were also issues established by the rural PDS sites as key to maintaining successful PDS sites and collaborative relationships.

One of the most consistent issues found across the PDS sites was the ongoing concern for a long term commitment of resources by the Benedum Project; i.e. the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation. After the initial year of funding , the Benedum Project was subject to a yearly "continuation proposal process". Although beyond the control of the Benedum Project staff, the university, or the PDS sites, the continuation proposal process represented a perceived "threat to the work being done". Teachers were at times unsure of the future of the project and were also concerned with the direction their PDS might take as a result of new funding requirements.

A second issue in maintaining the PDS sites was participation by public school personnel. This was seen as a key to developing the consistency and stability to "feel safe to take risks in the classroom" and to work as a faculty toward achievement of the school vision. Participation was not only an issue for public school participants, it was an issue about WVU representatives as well.

The PDS teachers showed great concern for WVU representatives attending functions at the various rural sites. Driving time to three of the three rural sites was approximately 30 minutes from the WVU campus on what has been termed "curvy, poorly maintained, pothole filled ridge roads" while other teachers have said "well, it's about 30 minutes unless you get behind a coal truck, then it's more than 90 minutes up the mountain".

Another area seen as a major issue was the continued effort to maintain an atmosphere of trust among the PDS sites and with WVU representatives. Many groups and individuals associated with the PDS sites and WVU committees have taken active roles to establish an atmosphere of trust. Efforts have included establishing a well balanced management team, setting minimum participation requirements for PDS representatives at CSSC meetings and proposal funding meetings.

Communication was another issue identified by all individual involved with this investigation. WVU representatives and Benedum Project staff viewed open communication as a key element to maintaining trust and participation by PDS teachers. PDS teachers saw open communication as a means of monitoring activity at other sites and progress made toward goals. The CSSC served as the primary conduit of information and sharing of concerns. It was at these monthly meetings that new information was announced, policy changes were described and developed, PDS site information was shared, and issues were discussed in a "town meeting" format.

In the spring of 1992 two additional issues, related but discrete, became evident. These issues were "time to stay involved in PDS activities and additional staffing to help maintain PDS projects". Time became an issue as a result of new requirements imposed upon the PDS sites by the Benedum Project. Teachers, administrators and community members were asked to re-

think their vision statements and undergo a strategic planning process. With this new process, teachers and administrators became concerned with the amount of time the new constraints were imposing on actual "teaching time". Some participants saw these planning meetings as a duplication of effort while others viewed the process as a new beginning.

At one point the idea of providing staff to assist in PDS sites with Benedum Project activities was brought up, it caught fire among the sites. Although no action has been taken on this issue to date, it appears the PDS sites perceive a need for additional staff within the PDS sites. Additional staff would have the roles of grant writers, clerks, in class aides, research assistants, and technical assistants.

Advice for others: Other interesting aspect of this investigation were the themes of advice which were developed as a result of participation of Professional Development Schools. Derived themes included participation, communication, understanding resources, "time to do", leadership, and "seek the dream".

Participation, as used in this investigation, refers to the involvement by public school educators in the PDS site, as well as the involvement by higher education faculty at the PDS sites. Participants viewed participation by PDS faculty members as "critical to realizing the vision". It was clear that not everyone was expected to participate in the initial stages of the developing PDS, and that was seen as an error by the sites. As one educator stated "if we had it to do over again, we would seek more of a commitment from our entire staff, not just their permission to become a PDS".

Communication was another issue about which advice was freely given. Communication refers to the ongoing efforts to exchange information between

all of the participants. It was important that "issues be kept on the table and that discussions were always permitted before decisions were made".

Additionally, a variety of suggestions were made by participants involving consistency. The project should "always ensure that all groups are represented on each and every committee". One change suggested by a PDS teacher was that "sharing time be made available, so that everyone in the school could be kept informed of decisions and information".

Perhaps the most emphasized advice came under the theme of developing understandings. Teachers, administrators, and WVU faculty all emphasized the importance of developing these understandings, although each of their definitions was different. The administrators defined the developing of understandings in terms of "line items". They knew there were mission and vision statements, and they knew there was money. The keys for the administrators involved the "how much" and "who will pay for" issues.

WVU representatives defined developing understanding as " a process the public school people needed to go through". They saw the developing of understanding as something that "primarily, the public school people needed". Within this group of WVU representatives were the facilitators of the process. These were the individuals who knew that "we all needed to work together, not just lecture but actually talk, decide, and act together".

Teachers used the term "developing understandings" mainly in a "what do you want kind of mentality". As teachers would talk, they would want to know "what is a PDS", "how do we get to be a PDS", "when will we become a PDS", and "is this really our vision". At first teachers saw PDS activities as "an unfamiliar mode of decision making", and it was not until the teachers empowered themselves that each of the sites truly became a Professional Development Schools.

The primary bits of advice concerning the development of understanding were to "work hard to develop a vision statement", and "always keep the vision in mind when making decisions". Regardless of position, or orientation, "time needed to be given to allow for disagreements and making up between groups; without it we could never progress as collaborators". Another educator indicated that "we all needed to be involved in creating the vision, it's a part of all of us. The discussion and our eventual agreement has made us collaborators; we have the same goals".

The fifth theme of advice developed from the data was the theme of properly allocating resources. This refers to not only the allocation of resources, but the procedures used in distributing the resources. Participants saw the yearly continuation proposal process as one of the biggest problems with the Benedum Project. Their suggestions included developing "long term commitments of resources from granting agencies", and "working hard during initial stages to solicit local support and commitment of resources"

Conclusions

What then has been learned through the establishment of rural professional development schools? The keys to development and maintenance of rural professional development schools are the existence of true collaborative activities, thorough planning, consistent 2-way communication, a commitment by all those involved, and a belief that the process is important.

Thorough planning does not mean that all of the PDS sites must be strictly controlled and have their actions laid out for them in advance. Rather, thorough planning refers to the planning which needs to be done in each PDS to develop

a vision, create collaborative relationships,a and implement an action plan. This was accomplished through a strategic planning process developed by the Benedum Project Staff (Field, 1992).

The presence of an open 2-way communication is one of the most important aspects in maintaining the PDS sites. This may take the form of an open forum for the discussion of issues, a consistent representation of each group at PDS functions, the inclusion of public school representatives in higher education functions. Information needs to be made available and participants need to be encouraged to share ideas, information and concerns at the PDS sites and with representatives of the higher education partner.

A commitment needs to be made by all participants in a PDS. Teachers need to commit to working together to create and achieve the vision, it is simply not enough to sit on the sidelines; everyone must be a player in the game. On the part of higher education, a commitment needs to be made to invest time and expertise. Faculty must be willing to make an honest effort to become a part of the PDS community, not merely be an occasional visitor.

Lastly, participants must buy into the idea that the PDS process is important. The very name "professional development school" calls up a vision that events and activity within the organization is different. Without the belief that the process is important, participants will not wish to be involved with professional development activities. Participants must commit to become better teachers, better managers, better collaborators, and must internalize the thought that as a result of the process schools, students, and participants will become better and more effective. **The process is Important!**

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